The Elderly Victim of Homicide: Limitations of the Routine Activities Approach

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Abstract

Routine activities theory suggests that when there is a convergence in space and time of motivated offenders, suitable victims, and a lack of protectors of the victims, the potential for victimization is high. Using this as a basis for predicting the victimization of the elderly, researchers have concluded that elderly persons are vulnerable, making them targets, if they venture outside of their homes. Yin (1985) reports that the elderly are often victims of predatory street crimes. But their most usual routine activity is to isolate themselves in their homes, making them less vulnerable (accounting for the low victimization rate). Routine activities theory has posited only one scenario from these facts about the elderly. It is our contention that other possibilities, with a basis in empirical findings, have been overlooked. Routine activities theory has suffered first from placing most of its emphasis on activities and ignoring or downplaying states of being -- the passive cognate of activity. In the case of the elderly, a consequence of age is social isolation which purportedly protects the individual from attack. This does not take into account, however, the social environment surrounding the isolation which could be the object for attack. Analysis of national data on homicide shows that a large proportion of homicide involving elderly victims occurs during theft-based attacks in the victims' own homes. These findings point to a need for revisions in the routine activities approach.

Introduction

Based loosely on the works of Hawley (1950) and Shaw and McKay (1942), routine activities theory uses regularities in behavioral routine to predict criminal victimization. It is hypothesizsed with the convergence in space and time of motivated offenders, suitable targets, and the absence of capable guardians the probability of being a victim increases. It is argued in this theory that the success in the fight against crime requires an understanding of how routine activities promote this convergence.

Most of the research directly related to routine activities has involved macro level analysis (Cohen and Felson 1979; Felson and Cohen 1980) which has examined the effects of urban structure, including measures of community size and density, on crime rates. In this research, there appears to be good support for the predictive capability of routine activities in explaining overall patterns of urban criminality. However, where micro level analysis has been attempted, the results have not been completely consistent with routine activities predictions.

Miethe, Stafford and Long (1987) report strong support for routine activities hypotheses with property crime. The same pattern does not appear for victims of violent crime. Unlike property crime, where the offender may materially benefit from this behavior, violent crime often involves interpersonal conflict or disagreement. Miethe, et al. suggest that because much violent crime is spontaneous, it defies the assumption of routine activities theory that criminals are rationally motivated and are able to reasonably calculate the risks of their crime. Equally important, simple exposure to an enhanced potential of victimization through routine activities seems an insufficient explanation of criminal violence.

The following research furthers the work of Miethe, et al. by focusing on a group of victims which were omitted from their analysis, that is, people who have been murdered. Because research data on homicide are not available in the same way that they are for other crimes measured through victimization surveys, circumstances surrounding the murder need to be reconstructed after the fact. Nonetheless, it is possible to look at the circumstances of the event to get some insight into the routines of victims which made them vulnerable to this crime.

This research will examine whether or not homicide can be understood using a routine activities approach. Of particular interest to us in this paper is the elderly homicide victim. Much has been written about the generally reduced risk of criminal victimization of the elderly due to their low levels of involvement in the routine activities of other age groups. The restricted lifestyle of the elderly keeps them more housebound, limiting their movement outside of the home to daytime hours, avoiding public places seen as threatening, such as bars. Given these attempts to reduce exposure to crime, elderly victimization would seem unlikely, yet it occurs. What, then, are the routine activities which make them vulnerable in comparison to other age groups?

There has been little attention in the research literature to the impact of routine activities in raising vulnerability to homicide nor has there been an assessment of the factors affecting victimization of specific age groups using national data. This paper will present data from the national homicide records for Canada which permit the detailed analysis of circumstances surrounding the killing of people from all age groups. As noted, our special interest in this paper will be the evidence from this data set concerning the conditions under which the elderly in Canada are likely to be victims of homicide.

Review of Literature

Routine Activities Theory

Routine activities analysis entered a phase of popular acceptance in criminological work with the publication of an innovative study of social change and crime rate trends by Cohen and Felson (1979). Cohen and Felson argued that much behavior is repetitive and predictable. Further, they suggest that, at a minimum, each predatory crime requires an offender who wants to do the crime and who has the ability to do it; a suitable target, judged in terms of its accessibility and vulnerability; and the absence of any protector of the target. According to the theory, when these elements converge in time and space risk of victimization is high. The timing of the acts will be based on what the offender thinks he (or she) knows about the activities of the target.

In a study that anticipates the routine activities approach, Hindelang, Gottfredson, and Garafalo (1978) present a set of propositions about victimization based on lifestyle. "Lifestyle refers to routine daily activities, both vocational activities ... and leisure activities"(Hindelang, et al., p. 241). They indicate links between routine daily activities and victimization and suggest that the variables age, sex, marital status, family income, and race are all bound up with lifestyle and play a role in predicting victimization. They propose eight propositions that link lifestyle with victimization patterns. First, the amount of time spent in public places will be related to victimization as will the amount of time spent in those places at night. Second, the probability of being in public places varies with lifestyle. Third, social contacts and interactions occur disproportionately among those that share lifestyles. Fourth, the chance of being a victim varies with the extent to which victims and offenders share demographic characteristics.

Fifth, the proportion of time that an individual spends among non-family members varies as a function of lifestyle. Sixth, the probability of personal victimization (particularly theft) increases as a proportion of the time that an individual spends among nonfamily members. Seventh, variations in lifestyles are associated with ability of individuals to isolate themselves from persons with offender characteristics. Eighth, variations in lifestyle are related to the convenience, desirability, and vincibility of the person as a target for personal victimization (Hindelang, et al. 1978:251-264).

These propositions suggest ways in which people will act and interact in urban environments. They set out strategies which people use to accommodate to the conditions which they face in the urban environments in which they function. In these propositions, emphasis is placed on the relationship between offenders and victims and the location of the offense. These factors have served as the focus of a great deal deal of homicide research. This is especially evident in the case of elderly victims.

Routine Activities and Elderly Homicide

The "fear of crime" and the victimization literature have consistently shown that the elderly are the least victimized age

group in American and Canadian society (Centers for Disease Control, 1986; Eve, 1985; Goldsmith and Goldsmith, 1976; Hindelang, et al., 1978; Yin, 1985; CUVS, 1985). It has been argued that the elderly lifestyle leads to isolation which, in turn, contributes to a lower rate of victimization (CUVS, 1985). But these findings must be viewed in the context of recent studies that have shown a rising rate of homicide against the elderly (Copeland, 1986; Wilbanks, 1981-82).

An early attempt at delineating the effects of lifestyle on victimization of the elderly was undertaken by Dussich and Eichman (1976). They suggest that for vulnerability to be attractive to an offender it must be obtrusive, that is, offenders must be able to locate targets and conceive of them as prime for attack. For instance, an elderly person, alone in an isolated area, is "obtrusive and vulnerable". However, generally the life-style of most elderly is unobtrusive, lowering the degree to which their vulnerability is blatant. Unobtrusive vulnerability should inhibit the victimization of the elderly.

Following from this research, Messner and Tardiff (1985) and Cohen and Felson (1979) suggest that as the elderly (and the young) spend more time in their homes and interact primarily with "family" members, they would more often be killed by family members in or near their homes than would other groups. Hence, while their routine activities protect them from strangers and predatory crime, they do not protect them from those closest to them -- their family (and perhaps friends) who would prey on their vulnerability. Messner and Tardiff, in their analysis of age-specific homicide rates in the United States, are able to confirm only that the elderly and the young are most likely to be killed at home. At the same time, the young and old are as likely to be killed by a family member as by a stranger (Messner and Tardiff 1985:254).[1]

Other research on routines of the elderly do not support the Dussich and Eichman hypotheses or the Messner and Tardiff's findings. Kunkle and Humphrey (1982-83) begin their research on elderly victims of homicide in North Carolina with the expectation that "...isolation and lack of mobility insulate the elderly from personal attack" (Kunkel and Humphrey 1982-3 p. 29). Their findings show, however, that the low visibility of the elderly does not make them less vulnerable to homicide. On the

contrary, despite their isolation, there has been an increase in murder of elderly.

Supporting Kunkle and Humphrey's findings, Copeland (1986) reports from research done in Dade County, Florida that homicide among the elderly is more common than expected, accounting for approximately five per cent of the total number of murders commited in the county during the previous five years. Contrary to both conventional wisdom concerning the elderly victim and previous findings, Copeland reports that the most common homicide circumstance involves robbery. Second most common is the situation where the elderly individual is a victim of a homicide during a burglary. Further, over 60 per cent of the homicide events involving the elderly in Dade County take place in the victim's home. The means of death is most often a gunshot wound but blunt force injury, sharp force injury, and asphyxia are also common (Copeland 1986:261).

The vulnerability of the elderly outside of the home when they have no protectors places them in a position of the minimum requirements for predatory crime, particularly theft. In the home, those people who are considered most likely to protect the elderly may turn out themselves to be violent perpetrators. But, the predictions of routine activities theory seem unable to account for the findings by Copeland (1986) that suggest that the perpetrator of homicide against the elderly in their own homes is frequently a stranger. This is in contrast to other age groups where the victim and offender are most often family members or friends involved in some form of an argument.

There is a need for clarification on the circumstances surrounding elderly homicide. To pursue this, the following research will be guided by a set of hypotheses predicated on routine activities predictions which draw on the assumptions laid out by Hindelang, et al. (1978) in their propositions presented above. These hypotheses will be considered in light of the contradictions in empirical findings on elderly homicide victimization.

Hypotheses

1. The elderly rate of homicide victimization will be lower than other age groups.

2. When killing of an elderly person takes place it is most likely to occur in the victim's home.

3. When an elderly individual is killed, the most likely offender will be a family member or friend while the least likely offender will be a stranger.

4. Means of homicide commission against the elderly will be consistent with means of commission for other age groups. Given hypotheses about most commission taking place in the home by family members, stabbings and beatings are the most likely means of commission.

5. The elderly are less likely than other age groups to experience crime (theft) based homicide, as their visibility as potential targets is reduced by their lowered exposure to situations in which these crimes are likely to occur.

These hypotheses will be examined in a descriptive fashion to test their validity. The data will then be analyzed using a multi-variate model examining these factors simultaneously weighing their relative importance in predicting differences in patterns of homicide across all age groups. This analysis will test for the importance of the relationship between offenders and victims and the opportunity provided by the location of the offense.

Method and Measurement

Data for this study originate with the homicide project of the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Statistics Canada. The data is supplied to Statistics Canada by Canadian police departments by means of the Homicide Return. The data tape includes detailed incident-based information on victims and offenders. In the case of the current study, all cases of homicide[2] committed between 1961 and 1983 are included.

In Canada, as in the United States, the traditional way of "officially" counting homicide is to count victims. Between 1961 and 1983 there were 10,627 victims of homicide and "official" homicide rates are based on this number. The 10,627 victims were involved in 9642 homicide incidents. In the current study we use the incident as the unit of analysis. Incident

level data present some problems when dealing with multiple offender and multiple victim cases. The solution in this study is to examine only one offender and one victim from each incident of homicide. We use all incidents and the principal offender for analytic purposes. Victim/offender relationship has been coded in terms of the closest relationship between any offenders and victims in an incident. Hence, we bias the data slightly towards intimate relationships.

Victim/offender relationship is divided into four categories. The group with the highest level of intimacy is labelled spouse/lover. This grouping includes husbands, wives (legal and common-law) and estranged lovers or those identified as involved in a love triangle. It represents those relationships where there was likely "romantic involvement" and a good deal of intimate interaction. The second group consists of any family members (legal and common-law) such as parents, grandparents, nieces, nephews, uncles, aunts, siblings etc. The more socially distant category of friends and acquaintances make up the third category. Victims and offenders involved in business relationships, friendships, casual acquaintances or other non-kinship relationships are included. The final category -- strangers -- includes those victims and offenders who had no known domestic or other relationship and those who were involved in criminal acts (besides the homicide) and had no known relationship. For the logistic regression analysis, this variable is recoded to strangers (1) and other relations (0).

Age and gender are provided for both offenders and victims. The elderly have been defined as those 65 years of age and older. The age categories of offenders are (1)<18 (2)18-25 (3)26-45 (4)46 to 64 (5)65+.

Means of offense commission is grouped into shooting, stabbing, beating and a composite category including strangulation, suffocation, drowning, arson and all other means. In the logistic regression analysis, this variable is recoded into the dummy variable, beating (1) and other (0).

For this study, location is grouped as victim's home, suspect's home, other private place, institution, public place and "other" . In the logistic regression analysis, this variable is recoded as victim's home (1) and other (0).

Precipitating crime is derived from a variable that asks about "motive". In the initial analysis, both theft and sex precipitated homicide are examined. Later only theft (1) versus all other "motives" (0) is used in the logit regression analysis.

Findings

Using the national data set and examining homicide perpetrated against the elderly, we find that this age group constitutes the lowest proportion of homicide when compared to other groups. Homicide involving victims 65 years of age or older accounts for 8% of all of homicides in Canada from 1961 to 1983 (N=732). This compares with 40% for those 26-45 and 20% each for those 18-25 and 46-64. However, the elderly are represented in homicide results in direct proportion to their numbers in the general population (8% average proportion of homicide over 23 years compared to 8% for the years 1961 to 1981 for Canada - Statistics Canada, 1984 99-932). Unlike Wilbanks' (1981-82) finding, Canadian national data do not reveal an upward trend in homicide against the elderly -- at least not in terms of the proportion of elderly victimized in homicides each year.

Hypothesis two predicts that the elderly are most likely to be killed in their homes. There is support for this prediction (see Table 1). The victim's home is the location of 72.4% of homicides involving the elderly, as compared to only 33.5% of those for the age group 18-24, for example. Most researchers suggest that younger individuals spend more time outside of the home and as a result will likely be victims in public places more often than the elderly who spend more time at home.

Building on the lifestyle hypotheses and the notion that the elderly spend more time at home than in other places, hypothesis three suggests that when the elderly are victims of homicide the most likely offender will be a family member and the least likely offender will be a stranger. Table 1 indicates, as predicted, that the elderly are more likely to be killed by someone they know than by anyone else (62%) but 38% of the elderly are killed by strangers (either during the course of another crime or not). This proportion is almost twice as high as it is for any other age group. It appears that the elderly have more to fear from strangers than do other age groups.

The fourth hypothesis deals with means of homicide. The elderly are more likely to die as a result of beatings than any other age group (see Table 1). The suspicion that they are more vulnerable to the consequences of physical violence against them seems to be supported by this finding. Contrary to the hypothesis, stabbings are a lower proportion in this group than in any other age group other than those under 18 and the proportion of shooting is lowest for this group.

We predict in our fifth hypothesis that the elderly are least likely of all age groups to be victims of crime based homicide, where a theft or robbery is the precipitating event leading to death. In fact, as can be seen in Table 1 (which summarizes the relationship between victims' age and selected variables for this population), the elderly group is twice to three times more likely to be victims of theft based homicide than any other group, supporting the findings in smaller, local samples presented by Copeland (1986). Thirty-six percent of all homicides with elderly victims are theft precipitated and another four percent involve sex related crime.

The descriptive analysis indicates that, indeed, the elderly are victims of homicide in their own homes and are most likely to die as a result of blunt force. Although the crime takes place in the home, stabbing and shootings are not common means of homicide commission. Further, they are victims of theft based murder more often than anticipated. Proportionately, they suffer from this kind of homicide more than any other age group. Using a multi-variate model, we can examine anomalies in our predictions to determine the bases for this pattern of theft based homicide. Using a variable dichotomized as theft based (1) versus non-theft based (0) homicide, a logistic regression model was constructed to include predictors of differences according to the important dimensions of routine activities outlined above. In Table 2 , the correlation coefficients are presented. In Table 3, the results of the logistic regression model for those under 65 and for elderly victims are presented.

The logistic regression analysis is generated for the dependent variable, theft-based homicide versus other homicide, compared for the two age groups (<65 and >65). With the predictor variables entered into the model, the resulting correlation matrix based on aggregrated Ns is presented in

Table 1
Summary Characteristics of Homicide Victims by Age and Precipitating Crime, Location of Offense, Victim/Offender Relationship and Means of Offense Commission

	Age				
	<18	18-25	26-45	46-64	65+
PRECIPITATING CRIME					
Theft	18 (1.7)	89 (4.7)	274 (7.5)	319 (17.6)	250 (35.9)
Sex	154 (14.8)	81 (4.3)	71 (1.9)	32 (1.8)	25 (3.6)
Other Crime	18 (1.7)	21 (1.1)	32 (0.9)	22 (1.2)	19 (2.7)
Other	853 (81.8)	1692 (89.9)	3291 (89.7)	1442 (79.4)	402 (57.8)
Total	1043	1883	3668	1815	696

N=9105
Unk=0
Contingency Coefficient=.34

LOCATION OF OFFENSE					
Victims Home	491 (52.1)	568 (33.5)	1563 (45.7)	967 (56.5)	485 (72.4)
Suspect's Home	64 (6.8)	195 (11.5)	332 (9.7)	111 (6.5)	21 (3.1)
Private Place	108 (11.5)	307 (18.1)	577 (16.9)	281 (16.4)	97 (14.5)
Public Place	184 (19.5)	443 (26.2)	703 (20.5)	274 (16.0)	50 (7.5)
Institution	2 (0.2)	31 (1.8)	54 (1.6)	13 (0.7)	2 (0.4)
Other (ie. car)	93 (9.9)	149 (8.8)	194 (5.7)	65 (3.8)	14 (2.1)
Total	942	1693	3422	1711	670

N=8438
Unk=667
Contingency Coefficient=.23

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Table 1 cont'd

	Age				
	<18	18-25	26-45	46-64	65+
VICTIM/OFFENDER RELATIONSHIP					
Spouse/ Lover	37 (3.5)	450 (23.9)	1218 (33.2)	441 (24.3)	74 (10.6)
Other Family	513 (49.2)	176 (9.3)	311 (8.5)	259 (14.3)	114 (16.4)
Other Relationship	287 (27.5)	926 (49.3)	1619 (44.1)	736 (40.6)	244 (35.1)
Stranger	62 (5.9)	182 (9.7)	238 (6.5)	108 (5.8)	46 (6.6)
Crime (Stranger)	144 (13.8)	147 (7.8)	282 (7.7)	273 (15.0)	218 (31.3)
Total	1043	1883	3668	1815	696

N=9105
Unk=0
Contingency Coefficient=.40

MEANS OF OFFENSE COMMISSION					
Shooting	226 (22.4)	861 (46.3)	1744 (47.8)	646 (35.7)	151 (21.8)
Beating	247 (24.5)	258 (13.9)	693 (19.0)	501 (27.7)	272 (39.2)
Stabbing	155 (15.3)	500 (26.9)	831 (22.8)	416 (23.0)	138 (19.9)
Other	382 (37.8)	242 (13.0)	377 (10.3)	244 (13.5)	133 (19.2)
Total	1010	1861	3645	1807	694

N=9017
Unk=88
Contingency Coefficient=.30

Table 2. The overall fit of the model is strong based on a Pseudo R2 of .493.[3] The parameter estimates are presented in Table 3. Of note in Table 3 is the finding that the models for the two age groups are different but parallel as the parallelism 2 is not significant.

The value of a logistics regression model derives from the ability to use parameter estimates to calculate probabilities of certain outcomes (probits) under specified circumstances. This calculation is based on the following equation:

$$P(Y-1) = \frac{e^{a + b_1 X_1 \ldots b_5 X_5}}{1 + e^{a + b_1 X_1 \ldots b_5 X_5}}$$

where a = intercept
e = the base of natural logarithms
$b_1 X_1$ = the age coefficient multiplied by the given age value (1) through 5
$b_2 X_2$ = the relationship to offender coefficient multiplied by (0)other (1)stranger
$b_3 X_3$ = the location of the offence coefficient multiplied by (0)other (2) home of victim
$b_4 X_4$ = gender of the victim coefficient multiplied by (0) female (1) male
$b_5 X_5$ = beating as means of offence coefficient multiplied by (0) other (1) beat

where the coefficients are calculated using the formula

log(p/1-p)/2 + 5 (SPSSX Release 2.1)

The products of these calculations are probabilities which can be presented as log-odds for the elderly versus other age groups. Using this calculation we find that for young suspects who are strangers, where the theft-based homicide occurs in the home and the victim is a female who is beaten, the probability of victimization for those under 65 is .50; for males under 65 it

Table 2
Covariance (below) and Correlation (above) Matrices of Parameter Estimates

		(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Age of Suspect	(1)	.001	.042	.014	-.082	.087
Relationship	(2)	.000	.011	.225	.069	.047
Location	(3)	.000	.002	.004	.175	.024
Gender of Victim	(4)	.000	.001	.001	.005	-.008
Beating	(5)	.000	.000	.000	-.000	.003

Table 3
Parameter Estimates of the Logistic Regression Model

	Regression Coefficients	Standard Error	Coefficient/ S.E.
Age of Suspect	-.472	.037	-6.324
Relationship	5.038	.105	23.839
Location	.652	.064	5.086
Gender of Victim	1.172	.070	8.495
Beating	.392	.056	3.523
	Intercept	**S.E.**	**Intercept/S.E.**
Less than 65	2.172	.157	13.858
Greater than 65	2.856	.178	16.082

Goodness of fit Chi-square = 185.21 df=136 p<.003
Parallelism test Chi-square = 11.18 df=5 p<.05

is .76. For those females over 65 the probability rises to .79; for males over 65 it is .92. The log-odds for females is 1.58 (>65/<65) and for males it is 1.21 (>65/<65).

Where the female victim suffers in her own home at the hands of someone who is young, for those under 65 the probability of theft based homicide is .01, for males it is .03. For those over 65, it is .02 for females (log-odds of 2.00) and .12 for males (log-odds of 4.00). In contrast, the probability of theft based homicide victimization taking place outside of the home of a female victim under 65 where the beating results in death is .33; for males it is .66. For females over 65 it is .74 (log-odds of 2.24) and for males it is .92 (log-odds of 1.24). The log-odds for in home versus out of home elderly homicide (all other factors as presented above) for females is 1.06 and for males it is 1.00.

For the elderly, when controlling for the age and relationship of suspect, then, the home is as dangerous a place to experience theft based homicide as public locations. This is an especially surprising finding given the low correlation between theft based homicide and location. This finding focuses attention on the danger of strangers to the elderly in their own homes.

Discussion

Our findings confirm some of the hypotheses developed from the routine activities approach and reject others. We find that elderly are victims of homicide in direct proportion to their number in the population. The elderly victim is typically killed in his or her home (as predicted) by a family member or acquaintance (as predicted) but close to 40% are killed during the course of a theft perpetrated by strangers (contrary to prediction). The proportion killed by strangers during crimes is much higher for the elderly than for any other group. Further, they are most often killed through beatings. These homicides seem to result from younger offenders attacking older victims in their domiciles during the course of a crime such as burglary.

In order to explain the anomalies in our findings, a re-examination of the conceptual bases for the hypotheses is in order. Routine activities theory suggests that at a minimum, the

conditions for predatory crime involve a convergence in space and time of motivated offenders, suitable victims, and a lack of protectors of the victims. Using this as a basis for predicting the victimization of the elderly, researchers have concluded that elderly persons are vulnerable, making them targets, if they venture outside of their homes. Yin (1985) reports that the elderly are often victims of predatory street crimes. But their most usual routine activity is to isolate themselves in their homes, making them less vulnerable (accounting for the low victimization rate). While we do not have direct measures of these routine activities for victims of homicide, the patterns expressed from victimization surveys should apply. In addition, the measures of location and relationship to offenders in homicide cases give us some indirect clues about these routines.

Routine activities theory has posited only one scenario from these facts about the elderly. It is our contention that other possibilities, with a basis in empirical findings, have been overlooked. Routine activities theory has suffered first from placing most of its emphasis on activities and ignoring or downplaying states of being -- the passive cognate of activity. In the case of the elderly, a consequence of age is social isolation which protects the individual from attack. This does not take into account the social environment surrounding the isolation which could be the object for attack. In a study of burglars and burglary, Reppetto (1974) shows that young burglars are more concerned with ease of entry to a dwelling than the goods that might be present for stealing. Further, areas with low occupancy rates during the day are the most likely to be considered good targets.

The scenario that has not been considered by routine activities theory is that the elderly person may not be the target of the crime at all, the dwelling and the goods it contains is the target. Taking into account the work of Reppetto (1974), Miethe, et al. (1987), and Copeland (1986), the picture presented by "routine activities theory" might read as follows: the elderly person, living quietly alone in an area characterized by low daily occupancy, is not perceived to be present by the thief. In a confrontation, when the elderly individual is found alone, the thief beats the victim. While a younger person might recover from such a beating, the elderly victim dies.

For the elderly, the safety of the home is offset by the vulnerability to attack during a crime and the greater difficulty in recovery from beating. Why would we find such high levels of crime-based homicide against the elderly when compared to other age groups? Clues to this may be found in the recent literature on the effects of injury on individual well-being. Research findings on the impact of personal theft against the elderly support the view that the elderly are especially vulnerable to the consequences, which are sometimes fatal, of this crime (Dussich and Eichman, 1976; Eve, 1985; Hindelang, et al., 1978; Kosberg, 1985; Skogan and Maxfield, 1981). The Canadian Urban Victimization Survey reports that while elderly victims are no more likely than younger victims to have suffered injuries as a result of victimization of any crime, the consequences of their injuries are typically more serious. "For example, elderly victims who were injured were twice as likely as younger victims to have required medical or dental attention" (CUVS, 1985:2). This concern is substantiated in medical statistics that report that the death rate from injury is higher among the elderly than younger people even though injury is the leading cause of death among these younger age groups (Committee on Trauma Research, 1985: 19).

The explanation of elderly homicide still fits into an explanation driven by routine activities. However, important components of this depiction are different from those initially derived. First, the target is redefined as an object rather than a person. Second, the motivation of the offender is that of a burglar rather than a murderer. Finally, the physical vulnerability of the elderly person (coupled with the lack of protectors and the state of being housebound) results in death. At the same time, in the case of family/friend victim-offender relationships predictions based on the Hindelang, et al. (1978) propositions would seem correct.

These findings provide support for the research reported by Miethe, et al. (1987) that violent crime is not well explained by routine activities. However, their explanation that violent crime is emotionally based and spontaneous may be only partially true, at least in the case of elderly victims. It is equally important to consider the possibility of the simple misfortune of the elderly victim who happens to be in the way of a burglar entering the victim's house in search of goods or money.

Routine activities theory is stated in "neutral" terms that identify protectors, victims, and offenders as part of a total environment. Implied, but not stated, is the motivation or reasoning force of the offender before he/she carries out the crime. Motive moves the event forward. In studies on victimization, however, we rarely have information on motives. It is relatively easy to apply a rationale to explain offender behavior the property crime but the many faces of violence present a more complex problem. The social psychology of the offender is critical for accurate prediction of crime incidence, as is knowledge of the conditions which may promote violence during this offense. Uncoupling the predictions of routine activities based on threat of discovery from those that focus on conflict that emerges from confrontation must be considered in further applying this theory to understanding murder of the elderly and, more broadly, all violent crime.

NOTES

1. Problematic for our purposes, Messner and Tardiff analyze the young and the old in their sample together, making it difficult for us to disaggregate the effects of routine activities separately for each age group.

2. The data set includes all recorded homicides for the 1961 to 1983 time period. We exclude infanticide (N=45) and manslaughter (N=36) for elderly as these crimes have been recorded only since 1974. Doing the analysis including these crimes makes no difference to the results.

3. This is calculated using the formula $2/(N + 2)$ (see Walsh, 1987).

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